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A Guide To Slovak Genealogy Resources in Eastern Pennsylvania:

The "Second Old Country" Along the Anthracite Track

by John Gabuzda

The subject "Slovaks in Pennsylvania," or the religious, educational, cultural and beneficial organizations and settlements founded by Slovak immigrants to Pennsylvania in the period 1875-1925 is a very large one. For although cities like Cleveland, Chicago, New York and Yonkers, Youngstown, Detroit, Bridgeport, Binghamton and Passaic would become home to the largest urban concentrations of Slovaks arriving in America, it was the small coal-mining and steel-making towns of Pennsylvania that formed by far the largest destination of this great Slovak immigration. Indeed, most studies show about half of the Slovak immigrants to the U.S. came first to PA, and formed these communities and churches I call "the Second Old Country."

In Western PA, the Pittsburgh-McKeesport-Johnstown area had significant settlements of Slovaks attracted to work in the steel and bituminous (soft) coal mining industries, and organizations impor-

tant to early Slovak-American history. These are not areas I can adequately cover in this short space, and are not areas I know well.

My focus will be on how to track down the best genealogical sources in the very diffuse dozens of small communities spread across Eastern PA, mostly located in the anthracite (hard) coal mining region that stretches for over 100 miles along I-81 from the state capital Harrisburg in south-central PA, northeast to Scranton. No single state, church or private organization that I am aware of can pull together all the information you may need, so I will be specific on places, dates, and types of information to be found at each source.

Assuming you have interviewed all living relatives and recorded all the information you can about where they came from in Slovakia, when they left, what towns they settled in, religion they practiced, and as many approximate dates of birth, marriage, death as you can

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Reminder of Meeting!
Saturday
October 10, 1998
Annual Membership
Meeting and Election of
Candidates

Special Mailing will be made
to most Minnesota members -
others who are interested
please call or send e-mail to
PaulMCzech@aol.com

See Calendar of Events p. 123

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find or estimate, a good place to start by mail would be the Pennsylvania Division of Vital Records. Birth and death records were recorded at the state level beginning in 1906. Before 1906, counties often recorded vital records a decade to a century before that, but the records are often incomplete and must be accessed through the local county courthouse. I will specify some county courthouse records later. Vital records from 1906 on cost about \$3 to \$4 a few years ago and are available by contacting Pennsylvania Department of Health, Division of Vital Records:

Philadelphia: 1400 W Spring Garden St.,

Room 1009, Philadelphia, 19130

Pittsburgh: 300 Liberty Ave, Room 512,

Pittsburgh, 15222

Erie: 1910 West 26th St, Erie, 16508

Scranton: 100 Lackawanna Ave, Scranton, 18503

All Other Areas: P.O. Box 1528, New Castle,

PA 16103 Telephone: (412) 656-3100

I believe the PA Vital Records can search up to a ten year period if the exact year of birth or death is unknown, for an additional fee of \$10. Place of birth/death is "vital."

If Vital Records can't help you, or you have little information about your Slovak ancestors to go on, a good place to start would be Philadelphia. Your first stop might be:

National Archives - Mid Atlantic Region, 9th and Market Streets, Room 1350, Philadelphia, PA 19107
Telephone: (215) 597-3000 Hours: Mon-Fri 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; 2nd Sat each month 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Useful microfilm collections available here include the entire US Censuses from 1790 to 1920 and Passenger Immigration Records for Philadelphia and Baltimore, in the rare case you can't find an ancestor immigrating via New York. The most useful to a PA genealogist are naturalization records for the three Federal Court Districts of Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Scranton. These Petitions and Declarations for citizenship often contain date and port of entry into the U.S. and village of origin in the old country, and are most often found at the county court level, but these three Federal court records are a good place to look if your ancestor didn't use the local county court to seek U.S. citizenship.

The other main genealogy research destination in Philadelphia is The Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies: 18 South Seventh St, Philadelphia, PA 19106,

Phone: (215) 925-8090; Fax: (215) 925-8195; Website
- <http://www.libertynet.org/balch>

Hours: Tues., Wed., Sat. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

E-mail: BALCHLIB@BALCHINSTITUTE.ORG

The Balch has collections on about 80 different ethnic groups in U.S. history -- 60,000 volumes, 6,000 microfilm reels -- and supports interlibrary loans of these materials if you can't make it to Philadelphia. A previous director of the Balch was Prof. M. Mark Stolarik, one of the foremost American scholars on Slovak immigration to America. Stolarik is now a professor at the University of Ottawa in Canada, but he left the Balch in good shape with its Slovak collection. I recommend Stolarik's 1989 book *Immigration and Urbanization: The Slovak Experience, 1870-1918*. In it, Stolarik discusses "chain migrations" of nearly whole villages in Slovakia to cities and towns in the U.S. -- often 60-80% of Slovak immigrants in an American city or town came from the same small region of Slovakia.

If you know you had ancestors who lived in Philadelphia, check the Philadelphia City Archives: 401 N Broad St., Suite 942, Philadelphia, PA 19108 Phone (215) 686-1581, 686-1582

Recorded here for the City of Brotherly Love are Birth Records 1860-1915, Deaths 1803-1915, Marriages (1860-1885), and Naturalizations (1794-1930).

Catholic baptisms and marriages before 1900 in Philadelphia can be researched for a fee at the Archdiocesan Historical Research Center in Overbrook. Call (215) 667-2125. Records after 1900 and most death/burial records are kept in each parish.

From Philadelphia Into Anthracite Country

If the preceding sources and their records have not gotten you close enough to your Eastern Pennsylvania Slovak roots, you are not alone. Most of you will have to find your way through a dozen county courthouses and ethnic Slovak churches in maybe 50 or so small cities and towns, so knowing the community where your ancestor lived, worked or prayed will be crucial to making the next step in your search manageable.

While steel was made at some Eastern PA locations (Dauphin and Lebanon counties near Harrisburg, Bethlehem Steel east of Allentown), and railroad jobs (Scranton) were also important, the vast majority of

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Slovaks were employed in Anthracite mines and allied businesses in mining communities. If you know an ancestor worked in coal-mining, and you have a strong reason to believe he was killed or seriously injured at mine work, the best source to trace this person is the Annual Report of the Inspector of Mines, issued in yearly volumes from 1870 on. These annual reports are grouped by coal region -- Western Bituminous districts separate from Eastern Anthracite ones, and within the Anthracite fields, from three to ten districts covering northern, central and southern fields are separated. It would help to know the year of death within a couple of years. The full set from 1870 are at Pennsylvania Heritage Anthracite Museum, RD1 Bald Mountain Rd, Scranton, PA 18504, Phone (717) 963-4804, under the care of Chester Kulesa, Hours: Mon-Sat 9-5, Sun 12-5.

Registers of Mine Accidents 1899-1972 are at the PA State Archives in Harrisburg, PA 17108-1026, Phone: (717) 787-2701.

As we move from southern to northern counties along the anthracite track, I will mention county court-houses (for most naturalizations and some pre-1906 vital records) and county historical societies I have used.

By religion, at least three-quarters of Slovak immigrants were Roman Catholic, Lutherans make up 10% or so of the total and Greek (or Byzantine Rite) Catholics another 5-10%, with small numbers of Calvinists, Jews and others making up the rest. For this article, I will focus on the Roman and Greek Catholic parishes; the three Roman Catholic dioceses of the Anthracite region -- Harrisburg, Allentown, and Scranton -- have no central record-keeping, so research must be done at the parish level! Each pastor may have a different policy regarding access to these records (may or may not allow you to view them, may require you to inquire by mail, etc.), so it is best to call. County historical societies don't usually have these Catholic records, so be polite to whoever you get at the rectory phone! Sometimes the pastor of a Slovak parish resides at another church; church address and office phone may be far apart.

Before leaving the Archdiocese of Philadelphia (which includes Bucks, Montgomery, Chester, and Delaware Counties as well as City of Philadelphia), I note that a large ethnic Slovak Catholic parish of Sacred Heart may be found at Phoenixville in Chester County. Now on to the Anthracite track.

Harrisburg Area

Slovak Catholics migrating to the Harrisburg area founded three parishes at Lebanon, Lebanon County, and at Shamokin and Mount Carmel farther north in Northumberland County. According to research done by Rev. Msgr. Thomas J. Kujovsky of the Harrisburg diocese:

St. John the Baptist, Mount Carmel - Many early pioneers were from Orava Co. in Central Slovakia, with the rest from Spiš, Šariš or Zemplin in the east. Founded about 1889-92.

Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary, Shamokin - Founded 1891-3, many original parishioners were from Spiš County, Slovakia.

SS. Cyril and Methodius, Lebanon - Steel, not coal, was the main industry in Lebanon. Most Slovaks here were from Western Counties of Nitra and Bratislava; about a third were from the eastern counties -- Spiš, Šariš, Zemplin. Founded 1900-06.

Smaller Slovak colonies without a separate ethnic parish in the Catholic diocese of Harrisburg were settled in: Bainbridge, Berwick, Cornwall, Kulpmont, Lewistown, Lykens, Marion Heights, Middletown, Newmanstown, Roaring Creek, Sheridan, Steelton, Williamstown. Main Chancery Office of Diocese of Harrisburg is at 4800 Union Deposit Road, P.O. Box 2153, Harrisburg, PA 17105. Phone: (717) 657-4804.

Allentown Area, East-Central PA

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Allentown, comprises these counties: Schuylkill, Carbon, Northampton, Berks and Lehigh. A complete list of ethnic Slovak parishes may be obtained by contacting the Chancery Office: 202 N 17th St., P.O. Box F, Allentown, PA 18105. Phone (610) 437-0755. However, I will mention a few key Slovak parishes and County resources in this area:

Just a few miles east of the Slovak parishes in Shamokin and Mount Carmel, northern Schuylkill County has two major Slovak coal-mining towns: in Shenandoah, St. Stephen's is a major Slovak ethnic parish; and in Mahanoy City, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 728 W. Centre St., founded 1890-3 is where I traced the earliest relatives of my father's family to make it to America-BVM's secretary Marge Hasara was very helpful.

Schuylkill County Courthouse in Pottsville, PA 17901 was where many Slovaks of Mahanoy and Shenandoah were naturalized, and the records are worth seeking out. Also at the courthouse in Pottsville

Roman Catholic: (listed geographically, south to north along I-81; all phones area code 717)

Parish	Date	Street	City	Zip	Phone
St. Joseph	1882	604 N Laurel St	Hazleton	18201-4398	454-0881
Holy Trinity	1908	178 N Wyoming St	Hazleton	18201-5543	454-3233
St. John Nepomucene	1894	420 Vine St	Freeland	18224-1435	636-3035
Holy Rosary	1900	60 Charles St	Ashley	18706-2999	822-7543
Ascension	1930	150 Main St (office)	Mocanaqua	18655-1599	542-4157
St. Joseph	1889	107 E Noble St	Nanticoke	18634-2899	735-0331
St. Stephen	1893	24 Wadhams St	Plymouth	18651-2117	779-5324
St. John Baptist	1925	Miners Mills	Wilkes-Barre	18705-3315	822-9561
Sacred Heart	1896	601 N Main St	Wilkes-Barre	18705-1794	823-4988
St. Joseph	1926	61 Hillside St	Wilkes-Barre	18703-0348	823-4168
St. Anthony	1910	One Wilson St	Larksville	18704-1521	287-4018
Ss. Cyril & Methodius	1900	(office above)	Edwardsville		287-4018
St. John Nepomucene	1923	471 Miller St	Luzerne	18709-0125	287-6600
Holy Trinity	1906	116 Hughes St	Swoyersville	18704-2196	287-6624
St. John Baptist	1892	16 William St	Pittston	18640-1892	654-2112
St. John Baptist	1904	408 N Main St	Taylor	18517-1108	562-1341
Holy Family	1895	510 E Gibson St	Scranton	18509-3295	342-8548
All Saints	1920	324 Ward St	Dunmore	18512-2492	342-6468
St. John Baptist	1907	520 Sanderson St	Throop	18512-1226	489-1822
Holy Ghost	1889	120 Willow Ave	Olyphant	18447-1442	489-2023
St. Michael	1911	no pastor; convent #	Jessup	18434	489-8861
Holy Trinity	1908	Prospect St	Simpson	18407-1244	282-2161
St. Michael	1921	612 Hudson St (office)	Forest City	18421-1428	785-3838

Source: 1998 Scranton Diocese Directory

are Birth and Death records (1893-1905) and Marriages from 1885 to present. In the same city are the Historical Society of Schuylkill County, 14 N. Third St. (717) 622-7540; Pottsville Free Public Library at Third and Market (717) 622-8880; and Pottsville Republican newspaper at 111 Mahantongo St., (717) 622-3456. While excellent on local history, because Slovaks were often ignored in local papers in their earliest years, these are of limited use to Slovak genealogists.

Just across the Carbon County line, St. Michael in Lansford has published an unusually well-documented Centennial book with 2600 names from villages in Nitra, Bratislava, Trenčín, Orava, Spiš, Zemplín: 124 E. Abbott St., Lansford, PA 18232-2012. (Note: order forms for the book can be obtained from Paul Makousky c/o CGSI).

The Carbon County Courthouse is at 4 Broadway in Jim Thorpe, PA 18229; office of Prothonotary may be reached at (717) 325-2481. The office of Register of Wills has marriage and death records dating to 1843; births for 1892-1905. The archives contain naturalization records from 1843.

Before we leave the area of the Allentown Catholic diocese, mention must be made of two large Slovak parishes there, both named Sts. Cyril and Methodius;

one in Reading southwest of Allentown, and the other in the steel town of Bethlehem just east of Allentown. I found a 1921 vintage History of Bethlehem, PA Slovaks edited by M.P. Pauliny at the Jankola Library in Danville, PA (see below).

Hazleton, Wilkes-Barre, Scranton

A tight band of 23 ethnic Slovak Catholic parishes trace almost a straight line on either side of Interstate 81 from the southwest end of Luzerne County to the northeast tip of Lackawanna County, all part of the Catholic Diocese of Scranton. The Hazleton area, just south of where I-81 and I-80 intersect, is where I grew up, and where some of the oldest Slovak parishes -- Catholic, Lutheran, Greek Catholic -- in America were founded in the early 1880's. This area competes with the Streator, IL area for the honor of oldest RC and Lutheran churches built by Slovaks in the U.S. -- I don't take sides in the debate, so no angry letters -- all founding dates are approximate!

Lutheran: St. Peter and Paul's Lutheran, 339 Washington St., Freeland, (717) 636-3080 the "oldest Evangelical Lutheran in North America," dating to 1883-6.

Roman Catholic: See table above.

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Greek (Byzantine Rite) Catholic

My hometown of Freeland also boasts one of the oldest Greek Catholic churches built in the U.S.: St. Mary, 643 Fern St., Freeland, PA 18224, (717) 636-0700, dates to the period 1885-7. Many ethnic Slovaks may be found in the Greek Catholic churches. The best way to search for them is to contact diocesan officials who have their own Catholic dioceses organized by national churches from Europe. Many Slovak-Americans, like those at St. Mary's, are in the Diocese of Passaic, NJ, Byzantine Ruthenian Rite, West Paterson, NJ 07424, Phone: (973) 890-7777. Other PA Slovaks of Greek Catholic parishes might be located by contacting the offices of the Ukrainian Catholic Byzantine Rite, Metropolitan Archdiocese of Philadelphia, 827 N Franklin St., Philadelphia, PA 19123, Phone: (215) 627-0143.

Scranton, Wilkes-Barre Area County Resources

Before we leave this area for our final stop on the tour of eastern PA Slovak genealogy resources, remember to check the Luzerne County Courthouse, N River St., Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711, Phone: (717) 825-1500. Many naturalization records for Slovaks from Hazleton north to Pittston may be found here, as well as some death records from 1893 to June 30, 1905. The Lackawanna County Courthouse is in Scranton for communities farther north. The Wyoming Historical and Genealogical Society, 49 S Franklin St., Wilkes-Barre, PA 18701, Phone: (717) 823-6244, open Tues-Fri. afternoons and on Saturday, is the best NE PA local history society.

Jankola Library, Danville

One of the World's Greatest Slovak Archives

Last, and by no means least, no tour of eastern PA Slovak records would be complete without reference to the Jankola Library and Slovak Archive Center, Villa Sacred Heart, Danville, PA 17821-1698, Phone: (717) 275-5606. Before making any mail contact or attempting to visit, I strongly recommend you call the director, Sister Mercedes Votyko, SS.C.M. It is impossible for me to summarize what the Sisters of Sts. Cyril and Methodius have collected over most of this century, in Slovak and English -- 10,000 books, dozens of complete sets of Slovak newspapers and journals, language and cultural materials from Europe and North America -- scholars and casual genealogists from both conti-

nents find it an inexhaustible resource.

Genealogical sources include statistical surveys (in English) by Emily Balch (1910), Thomas Čapek (1943), Jozef Stasko (1974) on Slovak migrations to the U.S. Konštantin Čulen's seminal work on the history of Slovaks is there; works of many authors writing similar histories in English quoting Čulen are there. A Bicentennial Study of Slovaks in America (1978) gives histories of Slovak-American cultural, fraternal, national organizations as well as 50 parishes from around the U.S. Or search the newspaper Jednota for monthly obituaries of all members in the period 1914-1942. Nearly complete sets of many other newspapers and periodicals abound and are a specialty of Jankola Library. A History of Bethlehem, PA Slovaks (1921) is on its shelves, too.

Titles of works on other Slovak communities outside of PA are also there: Slovaks in Chicago by Podkrivach; Dejiny Binghamtonských Slovákov, 1879-1919, 430 pp by Mazar; Slovaks of Yonkers, NY (1975) by Daniel Tanzone; Dejiny Clevelandských a Lakewoodských Slovákov by Pankuch; Ledbetter on the Slovaks of Cleveland; Panorama: Historical Review of Czechs and Slovaks in the USA (1970); Slovenski priekopníci v Amerike by Paučo; Slovak American Catholics by Sr. Martina Tybor; Slovak Catholic Parishes and Institutions in the US and Canada by Hrobak. Most but not all of these works are catalogued under Dewey Decimal classification, and multiple copies of many books exist, and may be loaned out in some cases.

Newspapers carried by Jankola Library include Jednota (published by First Catholic Slovak Union of U.S. and Canada, Middletown, PA), Slovak Catholic Falcon (Slovensky Katolicky Sokol); Ladies Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union; National Slovak Society; Slovak Spectator; Naše Slovensko; et al. Your ancestor may have had membership in one of these or many other similar fraternal, national or beneficial societies, and some of them retain original application information or published information or obituaries on members over many decades of their existence.

About the Author:

John Gabuzda, born in the Hazleton, PA area in 1959, has researched the family histories and descendants of a dozen immigrants from four families related to him who came from Eastern Slovakia to the Hazleton area in the period 1880-1920. Presently he is collecting records and reminiscences of families in-

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